DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 658 SP 041 725

AUTHOR	Cook, Timothy J.; Hudson, William J.
TITLE	Professionalization of Catholic High School Religion Teachers.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Catholic Educators; *Catholic Schools; Elementary Secondary Education; *Professionalization of Teaching; *Religious Education; Role of Education; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

This paper assesses religion teaching as a profession in light of selected characteristics that scholars agree are common to all professions. Evidence was drawn primarily from church documents and survey data from "The Next Generation: A Study of Catholic High School Religion Teachers." The findings indicate that religion teaching meets two of the seven selected characteristics and fails to meet five. The main conclusion drawn is that steps must be taken to professionalize religion teaching. To that end, recommendations are made for a professional association for religion teachers, credentialing standards, and a certification/licensing scheme. In the future, the degree to which religion teaching advances as a profession will greatly influence student learning, religion teacher credibility, recruitment and retention of religion teachers, and ultimately the religious mission of Catholic high schools in the United States. (Contains 42 references.) (Author/SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Running Head: RELIGION TEACHER PROFESSIONALIZATION

ED 479 658

Professionalization of Catholic High School Religion Teachers

Timothy J. Cook
Creighton University

William J. Hudson
National Catholic Educational Association

Suggested Citation:
Cook, T.J. & Hudson, W.J. (2003, April). *Professionalization of Catholic high school religion teachers.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Timothy J. Cook

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP 041 725

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This paper assesses religion teaching as a profession in light of selected characteristics that scholars agree are common to all professions. Evidence was drawn primarily from Church documents and survey data from *The Next Generation: A Study of Catholic High School Religion Teachers.* The findings indicate that religion teaching meets two of the seven selected characteristics and fails to meet five. The main conclusion drawn is that steps must be taken to professionalize religion teaching. To that end, recommendations are made for a professional association for religion teachers, credentialing standards, and a certification / licensing scheme. In the future, the degree to which religion teaching advances as a profession will greatly influence student learning, religion teacher credibility, recruitment and retention of religion teachers, and ultimately the religious mission of Catholic high schools in the United States.

Professionalization of Catholic High School Religion Teachers

Teacher shortages are impacting American schools. Because the nation focuses on shortages in subjects that affect all public and private schools such as science, math, and Spanish, it is easy to overlook the shortage of religion teachers that is affecting Catholic high schools (Cook, 1999). One might say that the dearth of qualified religion teachers is an invisible shortage.

How severe is the religion teacher shortage? Shortages have emerged as a result of the dramatic decline of vowed religious and clergy serving as Catholic high school religion teachers. Since 1985 their numbers have been roughly halved, dropping from 42% (Yeager, Benson, Guerra, & Manno, 1985) to 24% (Guerra, 1998). This turn of events has increased the demand for lay religion teachers. As a result of a recent national survey of Catholic high school administrators and religion teachers, Cook (2001b) concludes that the current shortage of qualified religion teachers is critical and that it will worsen in the future. In that survey, an overwhelming 86% of administrators responded that there are too few qualified religion teacher candidates in their geographical area. As for the future, 40% of the religion teachers indicated that they plan to cease teaching religion within 5 years.

Why is the shortage of qualified religion teachers a concern? The religion program is central to the educational mission of Catholic schools. "The special character of the Catholic school and the underlying reason for its existence, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the overall education of the students" (Pope John Paul II, as cited in Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, #66). A shortage of qualified religion teachers threatens the quality of the religion program and cuts to the heart of the Catholic school's *raison d' etre.*

The changing composition of religion faculties coupled with the resulting teacher shortage serve as compelling reasons to examine the current situation and make recommendations for the future. Cook (2001b) recommends that to improve recruitment, preparation, and retention of religion teachers, we must professionalize religion teaching. Building on this recommendation, the purpose of this paper is to assess religion teaching as a profession in light of selected characteristics that scholars agree are common to all professions. Although we believe that religion teaching is a vocation, in addition to being a profession, in this paper we focus on the professional aspects of religion teaching.

Theoretical Framework

Professions are occupational communities: they are thus a type of class based status group except that the community is organized explicitly within the realm of work rather that in the sphere of consumption. (Collins, 1979, p. 133) The strong professions are merely a particular occupation, one that has a distinctive culture and self-conscious organization (Collins, 1979). Hoyle (1995) defines professions as "occupations requiring

a high degree of knowledge and skill to perform social functions that are most central to the well-being of society." Sociologists cite medicine, law, engineering, dentistry, architecture, ministry, and accounting as examples of professions (Hoyle, 1995; Lortie, 1975; Rowan, 1994). Sociologists generally agree that medicine is the prototype profession because it possesses more agreed upon characteristics than the others (Webb, Metha, & Jordan, 2000).

Is teaching a profession? Teaching has evolved greatly since Horace Mann's creation of normal schools. Yet many theorists contend that teaching is a semi-profession or an emerging profession. During the 1980s a group of prominent education deans issued *Tomorrow's Teachers* (Holmes Group, 1986). The same year, the Carnegie Forum published *A Nation Prepared.* Both reports called for improved professionalism in teaching. In the early 1990s, in an effort to determine a knowledge and skill base for the teaching profession, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium – INTASC (1993) enumerated ten performance-based standards or principles that represent what experts believe professional teachers should know, be able to do, and be like. Regardless of specialty area, all teachers should possess knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to "student learning and development, curriculum and teaching, contexts and purposes which create a set of professional understandings, abilities, and commitments that all teachers share" (p.2).

Theorists offer numerous variations of the criteria used to determine whether an occupation is indeed a profession. Howsam (1976), in a report presented to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher (AACTE) by the Bicentennial Commission on Education for the Profession of Teaching, suggests twelve characteristics of a profession. This paper considers seven characteristics of professions gleaned from the twelve in its analysis of religion teaching as a profession. The seven selected characteristics are described below as they pertain to professions in general and the teaching profession in particular.

Essential Service to Society

Professions provide services or perform functions that are considered vital to the welfare of society (Hoyle, 1995). Few would disagree that healing the sick is an essential societal function. Using this standard, the status of a profession is determined by how central the profession's unique service is to the well-being of society. Some argue that the most mature professions are those that deal with matters of life and death. Howsam (1976) takes exception to the claim that teaching is a semi-profession because it does not meet this ultimate standard. He questions the interpretation of life and death, contending that teachers play a large role in determining the quality of human existence. "Proper professional decisions enhance learning and life; improper decisions send the learner towards incremental death in openness to experience and in ability to learn and contribute. Doctors and lawyers probably have neither more nor less to do with life, death, and freedom than do teachers" (Howsam, 1976, p. 15). Aside from the life and death debate, few would disagree that education plays a major role in all societies by socializing young citizens. Education is the bedrock of all free societies in which citizens

think for and govern themselves. For his part, Hoyle (1995) believes that the teaching profession does not need to prove itself in terms of societal value. "The importance of education, and hence teaching, to the well-being of society as a whole is sufficiently self-evident" (p. 13).

Motivated by Call to Serve

Lortie (1975) calls teaching essentially altruistic. Few enter teaching with hopes of making a significant amount of money. Rather, "career satisfaction for teachers hinges on the ability to pursue the personal values and beliefs that lead them into teaching- to be of service and to make valued contributions to young students" (McLaughlin and Mei-ling, 1988, p.39). Long-term effects of teacher professionalization may indeed result in higher remuneration and greater status among other occupations, however, for many this is not the reason driving professionalization. As Cooper (1988) states, "teachers' satisfaction, as researchers observe, is not solely a product of professionalization but of the fulfillment derived from positive relationships with children and a sense of efficacy drawn from helping children grow and succeed" (p.51). There is no reason to believe that professionalization would negatively impact this implicit motivation in teaching.

Special Knowledge and Skills

There is sustained debate currently waged in political circles concerning the balance between the need for strong content-based knowledge and specialized knowledge of teaching, or pedagogy. In the realm of professionalization, consensus on specific knowledge uniquely identifies an occupation as a profession. Specialized knowledge is primary among conditions that distinguish a profession from other occupations (Talbert and McLaughlin, 1994). "An occupation becomes a profession when it assumes responsibility for developing a shared knowledge base for all of its members and for transmitting that knowledge through professional education, licensing, and ongoing peer review" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 298). "In exchange, societies grant professions substantial autonomy and defer to them when making technical decisions" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 298). To that end, INTASC has developed standards to serve as the knowledge base and skill set for beginning teachers (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 1993).

Specialized, Advanced University Training

Related to developing a specialized body of knowledge for a profession, advanced university training often accompanies efforts at professionalization. Larson (1977) says that professions have special competence in esoteric bodies of knowledge linked to central needs and values of the social system. (p. x) Collins (1979) places heavy emphasis on the role of higher education in transforming an occupation to a profession. Drawing parallels with the medical and legal professions, advanced degrees produce an elitism that leads to higher status and autonomy. Evidence exists that advanced training leads to greater levels of effectiveness. "The key to successful professionalization of any practice is to convince client and the public that members of a profession, as a result of

education and practical experience, possess unique knowledge and skills that can be employed to solve the particular problems of practice and thus serve client needs." (Yinger and Hendricks-Lee, 2000, pp. 94-95). Darling-Hammond reports that in a review of existing research that fully prepared and certified teachers are better-rated and more successful with students that teachers without this preparation. (1997, p.308)

Public Trust and Status

Howsam (1976) lists "lower in occupational status" first in his list of characteristics of a semiprofession. Without question, teaching has an image problem. As Darling-Hammond (1997) notes, "teaching is evolving from an occupation that the public has historically considered routine 'women's work' requiring little skill to a profession that enables its members to become as capable as the real demands of the work require" (p. 294). Compounding this problem is the tension between legislation oversight of education and professional autonomy. However, status (reward) and control are not the characteristics of professionalism; they are the by-products. (Cooper, p. 47) Allowing a measure of control over teacher preparation to the teaching profession would in fact lead to higher status and at the same time, increase the public's trust in teaching. Improving their practice will support claims to improved status, provided the basic values of the profession command public support and appropriate financial remuneration. (Sockett, 1993, p.10)

Code of Ethics and Performance Standards

"Teaching in an educational context is strongly connected to the betterment of individuals. It is therefore impossible to talk extensively about teaching/teachers without the language of morality" (Sockett, 1993, p.13). Yinger and Hendricks-Lee (1999), drawing on Abbott's (1988) sociological analysis of the professionalization process, have argued that educational standards are one of the most powerful tools available for professionalizing teaching (Yinger and Hendricks-Lee, p.96). Codes of ethics have become a familiar part of the rhetoric of professional self-government and professional control. "From the Hippocratic oath to the code of ethics of the National Automobile Dealers Association, a declaration of commitment to ideal behavior has provided a source of unity for members of an occupation." (Sockett, 1993, p.119) Where the teaching profession is concerned, Darling-Hammond (1997) observes, "Teachers as a group do not share a common set of ethical commitments and knowledge for teaching because preparation is uneven and frequently waived altogether… socialization is weak" (p. 300).

Professional Organization

Professional organizations have several objectives, including shaping licensing procedures, influencing credentialing and educational requirements, and enhancing the public image of the occupation. They also have a unique way of affecting the social status of the occupation. Professional organizations contribute the creation of a "cultural currency" (Collins, 1979) that occupational gatekeepers look to in order to guarantee authenticity and a certain level competency. Social groups formed around positions in

division of labor (i.e., "occupations") construct and defend social and legal barriers that, in turn, affect the rewards of their members. Professional organizations affect the rewards of their members through credentialing, influencing licensing requirements, unionization, and forming occupational associations (Weeden, 2002).

Howsam (1976) discusses several professional organizations connected to the teaching profession. Founded in 1870 as a result of a merger, the National Education Association (NEA) is the oldest education-related professional organization that exists in the United States today. The organization's Preamble to the Constitution states that among other things, the NEA is to "serve as the national voice for education" (Howsam, 1976, p. 68). Within the teaching profession, associations for teachers of various subjects have sprung up. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) serve as two examples. These associations provide a forum for subject teachers to discuss common issues, monitor agreed upon standards, and serve as a collective voice to advance the cause of their profession.

Findings

Is religion teaching a profession? What follows is an analysis of religion teaching as a profession in light of seven selected characteristics. Evidence has been drawn from two sources primarily. First, Church documents were examined to ascertain how religion teaching is regarded by the Church conceptually. Second, data from *The Next Generation: A Study of Catholic High School Religion Teachers* were analyzed to determine how religion teaching is regarded operationally. *The Next Generation* survey project involved a national representative sample of approximately 1000 religion teachers in 200 American Catholic high schools (Cook, 2000, 2001b, 2002a).

Essential Service to Society

Official Church documents speak of the special contributions that Catholic schools make for the betterment of society and for advancing the educational mission of the Catholic Church. In its latest statement about Catholic schools, the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education (1997/1998) verifies how Catholic schools fulfill a public purpose for society. "...Catholic schools have always promoted civil progress and human development without discrimination of any kind. Catholic schools, moreover, like state schools, fulfill a public role, for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom and right of families to see that their children receive the sort of education they wish for them" (#16).

Documents issued by the Vatican and United States bishops speak uniformly of the special role that Catholic schools play in the educational and religious mission of the Catholic Church. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1977/1998) states unabashedly that Catholic schools "... perform an essential and unique service for the Church herself" (#15). Twenty years later, the Congregation affirms: "Thus it follows that the work of the [Catholic] school is irreplaceable ..." (#21). In the American context, the United States bishops have consistently referred to Catholic schools as the best means available for achieving the purpose of Christian education for the Church's youth

(National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972, 1976, 1990). Most recently the bishops affirmed, "It is our deep conviction that Catholic schools must exist for the good of the Church" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1990, p.2)

At the heart of the Catholic school's *raison d'être* is its "fundamental duty to evangelize" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997/1998, #3). That is to say, Catholic schools should help students grow in knowledge and belief of faith in general and the Catholic faith in particular (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979). This occurs through the complementary methods of faith formation and religious instruction (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997).

Catholic Church leadership recognizes the essential role that teachers play in determining whether Catholic schools fulfill their educational and religious mission. "Teachers must remember that it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose" (Vatican Council II, 1965/1996, #8; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997/1998, #19). Among teachers, Church documents point to the central role that religion teachers play in the evangelizing mission of Catholic schools, calling their role one "of first importance" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, #59). In *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) states unequivocally, "The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved" (#96).

Motivated by Call to Serve

The Catholic Church regards teaching in a Catholic school to be a vocation or calling (Vatican Council II, 1965/1996; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1978; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, 1997/1998; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997). The Congregation for Catholic Education (1997/1998) states, "we must remember that teachers and educators fulfill a specific Christian vocation and share an equally specific participation in the mission the Church ..." (#19).

The sense of vocation and service is even more pronounced when documents speak about catechists including religion teachers. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1979) identifies "response to a call" as an essential quality that all catechists must possess. "As important as it is that a catechist have a clear understanding of the teaching of Christ and His Church, this not enough. He or she must also receive and respond to a ministerial call, which comes from the Lord and is articulated in the local Church by the bishop" (#206). The National Catechetical Directory lists "servant of the community" as another ideal quality of the catechist (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979, #210). For the catechist, the commitment to serve others should flow naturally and authentically from experiencing Christian community.

The Next Generation survey data indicate that faith and other intrinsic values do indeed serve as the primary motivators for teaching religion. When asked to prioritize their top three reasons for choosing to teach religion, 75% of the 959 teachers surveyed marked "I realize the difference I can make in the faith life of my students." The other

two responses most often included in the top three reasons were "I enjoy teaching religion" (74%) and "I consider teaching religion an integral part of my personal faith journey" (60%) (Cook, 2001b). Echoing the sense of calling, a religion teacher remarks, "Teaching religious studies is truly a vocation. It satisfies a desire for a divine purpose, as we are an integrated part of our students' faith life. It allows meaning and ministry to emerge beyond the profession."

Special Knowledge and Skills

A list of special knowledge and skills that religion teachers should possess does not exist. In the most general sense, since INTASC standards represent a common core of teaching knowledge, skills, and disposition for all beginning teachers, then one could argue that these principles apply to religion teachers as well. Although INTASC is currently translating these standards into discipline-specific ones, this will not happen for religion since religion is not taught in American public schools.

Catholic Church documents provide little guidance for identifying and/or fully describing a knowledge and skill set for religion teachers. For example, in their list of ideal catechist qualities, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1979) devotes merely one paragraph to knowledge and skills. "They must have a solid grasp of Catholic doctrine and worship; familiarity with scripture; communication skills; the ability to use various methodologies; understanding of how people grow and mature and of how persons of different ages and circumstances learn" (#211). In the new *General Directory for Catechesis*, the Congregation for the Clergy (1997) only alludes to knowledge and skills in the chapter about norms and criteria for catechesis. Galetto (1996) contends that very little is written about catechists in general, let alone religion teachers in particular. He states bluntly, "an obvious lacuna is present" (p. 2). When searching for a set of catechist qualifications or determinants of effectiveness, which would include knowledge and skills, Galetto (1996) concludes, "the hunt for descriptors yields a broad, confused, and inconsistent list of terms" (p.2).

Research evidence suggests that religion teachers probably lack consensus about the specific knowledge and skills they believe they need to be effective. It appears that religion teachers cannot even agree on what the goals of the Catholic high school religion program should be, especially as they relate to school goals. Lund (1997) discusses the continuing debate about whether religion teachers should emphasize the cognitive or affective dimension of religion. Survey data bear out this philosophical difference among religion teachers. When asked if they thought the "primary" role of the religion teacher is religious instruction (i.e., academic study) or catechesis (i.e., faith formation), respondents were almost evenly split. Of the 959 religion teachers surveyed in *The Next Generation* study, 45% selected religious instruction as their primary role and 55% chose catechesis. Among subsets, vowed women and men religious were more likely to view their role as that of catechist. Religion teachers younger than 40 years of age were evenly divided.

Another indicator that there is a lack of consensus about religion program goals, and therefore requisite knowledge and skills of religion teachers, lies in the different names that schools attach to the department whose responsibility is religious education. Hudson (2002) reports that although the majority of high schools (58%) call theirs the Religion Department, almost half (42%) use other titles. Over one-third (34%) refers to theirs as the Theology Department. The remaining schools (8%) use names like Religious Studies, Faith Formation, and Spiritual Formation. Because the language and word choice that Catholic schools use reflect their core values (Cook, 2001a), even the terminology that is used for department titles is significant. In short, terminology reflects goals. According to O'Malley (1990), theology deals with knowledge and religion deals with practice. One could conclude from this distinction that a department whose title is Theology signifies a more academic approach to the subject.

Specialized, Advanced University Training

Church documents recognize the need for specialized training for religion teachers, in addition to their personal spiritual formation, and speak of it in terms of the pedagogical, theological, and professional dimensions (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, 1988; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997). Reinforcing the importance of specialized training for religion teachers, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) asserts, "In this area, especially, an unprepared teacher can do a great deal of harm. Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic school have adequately trained religion teachers; it is a vital necessity and a legitimate expectation" (#97).

Although Church documents discuss university-based training, they are not very specific in this regard. "We need to look to the future and promote the establishment of formation centers for these teachers; ecclesiastical universities and faculties should do what they can to develop appropriate programs so that the teachers of tomorrow will be able to carry out their task with the competence and efficacy that is expected of them" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, #97). There is almost no mention of university degrees in Church documents, let alone advanced degrees, in relation to religion teachers. The following quote captures the essence, and level of specificity, of what Church documents state about religion teacher preparation. "With appropriate degrees, and with an adequate preparation in religious pedagogy, they will have the basic training needed for the teaching of religion" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, #66).

Although "appropriate degrees" and "adequate preparation … in pedagogy" is subject to interpretation, *No Child Left Behind* (2001) offers useful benchmarks. This federal law defines "highly qualified" teachers as those who have earned an undergraduate or graduate major in their field, as well as state certification. Using this definition, how do religion teachers measure up? According to *The Next Generation* data, 57.1% of religion teachers completed an undergraduate or graduate major in theology, religious studies, or religious education. In other words, slightly more than half of American Catholic high school religion teachers are considered "highly qualified" in terms of degrees according to *No Child Left Behind*. Using state certification as the

pedagogical benchmark is more problematic because only two states – Nebraska and Wisconsin – certify teachers in theology, religious studies, or religious education. Nevertheless it is still instructive to note that less than half (47%) of religion teachers are certified in any subject. This percentage falls well below the 67% of Catholic high school teachers overall who hold certification in some subject (Schaub, 2000).

Where advanced degrees are concerned, only 4 out of 10 full-time religion teachers report having a master's or doctorate in the field (i.e, theology, religious studies, or religious education). From a longitudinal point of view, the situation has actually worsened in the last two decades. Since 1985, the percentage of full-time religion teachers who hold advanced degrees has fallen from 57% to 41%. This trend is especially alarming in view of the fact that 96% of religion teachers with advanced degrees in the subject affirm that the degree has positively impacted their effectiveness as religion teachers (Cook, 2001b,2002b). Ironically, this last finding supports religion teaching's potential as a profession.

Code of Ethics and Performance Standards

A code of ethics for religion teachers in Catholic schools does not exist at this point in time. In part, this is due to the decentralization of the Catholic school system. In particular, Catholic secondary schools are often independent even within the diocesan structure. As a result, there is very little consistency from school to school and from diocese to diocese. Neither the Department of Education at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops nor the National Catholic Educational Association has understood its role to develop overarching requirements for certification, licensing, or performance standards, not wanting to overstep the autonomy of diocesan bishops.

The closest reference to performance standards in Church documents deals with catechists in general. "As catechists, they will meet standards equivalent to those for other disciplines ..." (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979, #232). Operationally, performance standards most probably exist at the school level and perhaps at the diocesan level. Many schools have professional expectations that are included in faculty handbooks and are referenced in employee contracts. These expectations run the gamut from general performance to moral codes of behavior. However, a specific code for religion teachers that provides assurance of quality performance or functions as parameters or guidelines for professional work has yet to be develop, even though it clearly impacts the professionalism of occupations.

Public Trust and Status

The Christian faith tradition has held teachers in high esteem since biblical times. The New Testament lists teaching as a charism, or gift of the Holy Spirit, that is used to build the Kingdom of God on earth (Eph 4:7-16). Catholic Church documents elevate teaching to the status of vocation, stating that it is "not simply" a profession (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, #37). Among vocations within the Church, teaching seems to be held in high regard. For instance, Vatican Council II (1965/1996)

speaks of the "excellence of the teaching vocation" (p. 587). With specific regard to the teaching of religion, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) declares, "The teaching of religion is, along with catechesis, 'an eminent form of the lay apostolate'" (#57). Among teachers, religion teachers appear to hold a special place insofar as the Congregation for Catholic Education refers to them as being "of special importance" (1982, #59) and as being "the key, the vital component" (1988, #96).

Church documents also address the status of the religion curriculum within the Catholic school's overall educational program. For one thing, a comparable amount of time should be set aside each week for religious instruction as is for other subjects (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988). With regard to rigor, the *General Directory for Catechesis* sums it up this way:

> It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigor as other disciplines. It must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge. It should not be an accessory alongside of these disciplines ..." (Congregation for the Clergy,1997, #73)

Is the status of religion teachers as high as Church documents say it should be? Written comments made by *The Next Generation* respondents suggest that a number of religion teachers perceive religion teaching to be undervalued both as a vocation and as a profession. One teacher writes, "I think Church leadership still thinks of vocation only in terms of vowed religious life. You never see religion teachers represented at vocation fairs nor does the priest ever include religion teaching as an option in homilies about vocations." Many respondent comments reflected a perception that colleagues and administrators often do not consider religion teachers professionals. In the words of one respondent, "As a religion teacher, I feel like a second class citizen among the faculty." Teachers often remarked about the need for more respect, support, affirmation, and appreciation for the work that they do.

According to respondents, there seems to be a pervasive perception that anyone can teach religion, which impacts the profession's credibility. One religion teacher states fervently, "I am really tired of the attitude that anyone can teach religion. I once lost a possible position because school trustees decided than an English teacher could teach Scripture. Another teacher adds, "Would you hire someone to teach math that had never had math training at the university level? Why is this done with theology?" Yet another teacher concludes, "The myth that anyone can teach religion is ultimately hurting the students." One teacher's remark suggests that lack of status is related in part to lack of professional credentials. "Recognize religion teachers as professionals. Provide them with a means for certification, recognized by the state, that will help them be more credible as professionals."

Is the status of the religion curriculum and program as high as Church documents say it should be? Two data sets offer perceptions about the rigor of religion courses in relation to other subject courses. *The Next Generation* data reveal that approximately 4 out of 10 religion teachers (39.3%) consider religion courses to be less rigorous than other courses at their school. Interestingly, in a survey of chief administrators of Catholic high schools, only 9% believe their religion teachers think religion courses are less rigorous than others. In essence, chief administrators perceive religion teachers to think their religion courses are more rigorous than in reality they do. In the same survey, nearly one-third (31%) of the chief administrators believe that faculty outside the religion department perceive religion courses to be less rigorous than other courses (Hudson, 2002). The latter result raises the question of whether the chief administrators overestimated the perception of religion course rigor among other faculty as they did with religion faculty.

Religion teacher comments on *The Next Generation* survey provide qualitative data about the status of the religion program in relation to other subjects and the overall school program. Most comments were expressions of concern about the religion program's lack of stature. One teacher laments, "In many high schools, religion is less valued than athletics and other academic areas; it becomes 'expendable.' It should not become the class from where students are automatically pulled as the need arises nor the dumping ground for teachers who need an extra class to fill their schedule." Another teacher urges, "The religion program must be taken seriously. Religion teachers should not have to defend demanding assignments or fight for funding in a Catholic school. Religion should be central, not a peripheral course that shouldn't interfere with students' 'real' studies." In sum, it would appear that religion teachers do not enjoy the status that Church documents promulgate. Instead of being at the center of the Catholic school enterprise, many religion teachers feel they and their programs have become marginalized.

Professional Organization

In *Lighting New Fires: Catholic Secondary Schools for the 21st Century*, the five-year strategic plan of the Secondary Schools Department, particular emphasis is placed on supporting schools in the areas of Catholic identity and faith development. *Lighting New Fires* sets forth the goal of assisting "Catholic secondary schools in strengthening their unique Catholic identity by fostering faith development among administrators, faculty, staff, students, families and boards and by supporting the growth of secondary schools as faith communities." Other academic disciplines, such as math, science and English, have professional organizations that promulgate ideas and assistance in their respective fields. Not so, says Cook (2001), for the religion teacher. "Most teaching fields have a professional organization. These associations of teachers reduce teacher isolation and provide a forum where goals can be discussed, strategies shared and concerns aired. Associations for religion teachers would both strengthen the profession as well as broaden the web of support for teachers in the field" (p. 555-556).

In an effort to address this need, NCEA's Secondary Schools Department is forming a professional association for religion teachers and campus ministers. Responding to both research on occupational professionalization and to needs identified by religion teachers, the stated goals of the association include the development of professional standards and a code of ethics. Other goals include improving the delivery of service, influencing religion teacher certification, preparation, and education, and attending to personal growth. The mission statement, objectives, strategies, and action steps were presented to the NCEA Secondary Schools Department Executive Committee during their winter meeting January 24-27, 2003. The mission statement and strategic plan were approved and will be a topic of discussion at regional meetings during the fall of 2003. The executive committee also recommended that a timeline for implementation be developed and that additional funding be sought to realize the strategic plan.

Discussion

Religion teaching appears to be a low status occupation in a low status profession. Of the seven selected characteristics of a profession, religion teaching measures up to other professions on only two. Although religion teaching provides a valued service and religion teachers are intrinsically motivated, other essential elements that structure a profession are not fully developed or are not available for the religion teacher. There are no commonly agreed upon professional standards or system of credentialing that would establish minimum requirements for content knowledge or pedagogy. The number of religion teachers with advanced university training has dropped to the point where these teachers are in the minority. Certification or licensing is practically non-existent save for two states, Wisconsin and Nebraska. No national association currently exists for the religion teacher. Lastly, perceptions of religion as a profession and as a subject are demoralizing to members of the profession.

Steps must be taken to professionalize religion teaching if they are to reach their full potential and help Catholic schools fulfill their educational mission. Any action plan designed to help advance the professionalism of the religion teacher will need to address the following issues:

Professional Association

A professional association is crucial for the advancement of the religion teacher. An effective professional association could serve these purposes, among others: Promote religion teaching as a vocation and as a profession; strengthen support for the religion program as central to the school's overall mission; build consensus about the goals and outcomes for the religion classroom in light of total school religious mission; provide a forum for determining a knowledge base and skill set for the profession, code of ethics, entry and promotion standards for the profession, and curriculum standards; and sponsor a journal for research and best practices.

By establishing performance standards and a code of ethics, for example, the professional association influences the establishment of credentialing and minimum educational and pedagogical standards for hiring. Institutions that bear the public responsibility for ensuring quality of service, in this case, schools, higher education and dioceses, often look to professional associations in developing policies, requirements and procedures. Associations also develop professional development opportunities and resources that raises the proficiency of it members.

Credentialing

Credentialing has as its ultimate focus the needs of students in Catholic schools. Credentialing also influences how a profession is perceived. Lack of credentials has undoubtedly impacted the perception and credibility of religion teachers negatively. Religion teachers would be served by the development of an agreed upon system of educational and pedagogical standards necessary for teaching religion. For the integrity of the religion teacher, these standards must include core academic knowledge in the form of a degree that is conferred by formal educational institutions and pedagogical skills necessary to effectively engage students in the learning process. The establishment of norms for religion teacher education provides a common basis of judgment to determine the expertise of an individual.

Certification/Licensing

It seems unlikely that states would follow the lead of Nebraska and Wisconsin in issue state licensing for religion teachers. In the absence of the state, it is only natural that the diocese step in and formulate a process of certification that is mandatory for every religion teacher in the diocese and require that schools hire only those individuals who possess this certification. In doing so, certification ensures that only qualified individuals teach religion and further supports the role of higher education in developing educational programs.

Conclusion

Based on the research presented in this paper, religion teachers could justifiably be called the weakest professional link in American Catholic high schools. The current situation jeopardizes religion teacher credibility, student learning and formation, and ultimately the religious mission of Catholic high schools. This situation calls for the professionalization of religion teaching. As paradoxical as this suggestion sounds during a time of religion teacher shortages, we argue that the degree to which religion teaching advances as an education profession will greatly influence future recruitment and retention of religion teachers and will ultimately determine how effective and credible religion teachers will be in carrying forward the faith-based mission of Catholic schools.

References

Abbott, Andrew (1998). *The system of professions: An essay on the division of expert labor.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, Task Force on Teaching as a Profession. (1986). *A nation prepared: Teachers for the twenty-first century.* New York: Carnegie Forum.

Collins, Randall (1979). The credentialed society: A historical sociology of education and stratification. New York: Academic Press.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1977). *The Catholic school.* Washington, DC: UnitedStates Catholic Conference.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1982). *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to faith.* Boston, MA: The Daughters of St. Paul.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1997/1998). *The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium.* Boston: Pauline Books & Media.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1988). *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school.* Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

Congregation for the Clergy. (1997). *General directory for catechesis.* Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

Cook, T.J. (2000). The next generation: A study of Catholic high school religion teachers. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice, 4*(1), 115-121.

Cook, T. J. (2001a). *Architects of Catholic culture.* Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

Cook, T.J. (2001b). Recruitment, preparation, and retention of Catholic high school religion teachers. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice, 4*(4), 530-564.

Cook, T.J. (2002a). Cast a wide net: Tips for recruiting future religion teachers. *Momentum, 33*(2), 16-19.

Cook, T.J. (2002b). Teachers. In T.C.Hunt, R.J. Nuzzi, & E.A. Joseph (Eds.), *Catholic schools still make a difference: Ten years of research 1991-2000.* Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

Cook, T.J., & Fraynd, D.J. (1999). Where will we find our next religious education teachers? *Momentum, 30*(2), 14-16.

Cooper, Myrna. (1988). Whose culture is it, anyway? In A. Lieberman (Ed) *Building a professional culture in schools* (pp. 45-54). New York: Teachers College Press.

Darling-Hammond, Linda (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Galetto, P. W. (1996). *Building the foundations of faith: The religious knowledge, beliefs, and practices of Catholic elementary school teachers of religion.* Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

Guerra, M. J. (1998). *CHS 2000: A first look.* Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

Holmes Group (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers: A report of the holmes group.* East Lansing, MI: Holmes Group.

Howsam, R.B. (1976). *Educating a profession.* Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Hoyle, E. (1995). Teachers as professionals. In L.W. Anderson (Ed.) *International encyclopedia of teaching and teacher education* (pp. 11-15). New York: Pergamon.

Hudson, W.J. (2002). *Window on mission: A chs 2000 report on academic and co-curricular programs and services and religious education and formation.* Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium. (1993). *Model standards for beginning teacher licensing, assessment and development: A resource for state dialogue.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Larson, M. S. (1977). *The rise of professionalism.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lortie, D.C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lund, L. L. Religious education in Catholic secondary schools: Patterns and possibilities for the 90s and beyond. In M.F. Taymans (Ed.), *Patterns and possibilities: Exploring religious education in the Catholic secondary school* (pp. 41-63). Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

McLaughlin, M.W. & Mei-ling, S. (1988). School as a place to have a career. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Building a professional culture in schools* (p. 39). New York: Teachers College Press.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1972). *To teach as Jesus did.* Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1976). *Teach them*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1979). *Sharing the light of faith: National catechetical directory for Catholics of the United States*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1990). *In support of Catholic elementary and secondary schools*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

No Child Left Behind Act (2001). Retrieved December 20, 2002 from http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/107-110.pdf

O'Malley, W.J. (1990). *Converting the baptized: A survival manual for parents, teachers, and pastors*. Allen, TX: Tabor.

Rowan, B. (1994). Comparing teachers' work with work in other occupations: Notes on the professional status of teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 23(6), 4-17,21.

Schaub, M. (2000). A faculty at a crossroads: A profile of American Catholic school teachers. In J. Youniss & J.J. Convey (Eds.), *Catholic schools at the crossroads: Survival and transformation* (pp. 72-86). New York: Teachers College Press.

Sockett, H. (1993). *The moral base for teacher professionalism.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Talbert, J. E. & McLaughlin, M.W. (1994). Teacher professionalism in local school contexts. *American Journal of Education, 102*(2), 123-153.

Vatican Council II. (1965/1996). Declaration on Christian education (*Gravissimum Educationis*). In A. Flannery (Ed.), *Vatican Council II: The basic sixteen documents* (pp. 575-591). Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co.

Webb, L.d., Metha, A., & Jordan, K.F. (2000). *Foundations of American education* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Weeden, K. (2002). Why do some occupations pay more than others? Social closure and earnings inequality in the United States. *American Journal of Sociology, 108*(1), 55-101.

Yeager, R. J., Benson, P. L., Guerra, M. J., & Manno, B. V. (1985). *The Catholic high school: A national portrait*. Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

Yinger, R.J. & Hendricks-Lee, M.S. (2000) The language of standards and teacher education reform. *Educational Policy, 14*(1), 94-106.

Address for correspondence:
Timothy J. Cook
Assistant Professor
Department of Education
Creighton University
2500 California Plaza
Omaha, NE 68178
UNITED STATES
<tcook@creighton.edu>

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Professionalization of Catholic High School Religion Teachers

Author(s): Timothy J. Cook / William J. Hudson

Corporate Source:

Publication Date: April 2003

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) *and* paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: Timothy J. Cook	Printed Name/Position/Title: Timothy J. Cook / Assistant Professor
Organization/Address: Creighton University, Omaha, NE 68178	Telephone: 402.280.2561 FAX: 402.280.1117
	E-Mail Address: tcook@creighton.edu Date: 5/28/03

(Over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
1129 SHRIVER LAB
COLLEGE PARK, MD 20742-5701
ATTN: ACQUISITIONS

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)